

Some Important Sharada Inscriptions of Kashmir - A Socio-Political Study

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In the second half of the 9th century, we find in the Brahmi alphabet of North Western India a distinct development of a new alphabet which, though agreeing in many respects with that used in the epigraphic and literary records of the 7th and the 8th centuries, including the famous Gilgit Manuscripts, shows several essential differences in the forms of several characters. This alphabet is known as the Sharada alphabet. Though an alphabet of Kashmir *par excellence*, the Sharada has remained for several centuries a popular script of an extensive area of North Western India including Gandhara or the north-western part of Pakistan, Ladakh, Jammu, Himanchal Pradesh, Punjab and Delhi. Nothing is known for certain with regard to the origin of the name of the alphabet, but this much is certain that it must have originated in Kashmir which, from earliest times, has been the principal seat of Sharada or the goddess of learning and has been named after her as Sharada - mandala or Sharada - pitha.

We may now make a brief mention of some important Sharada records of Kashmir and see what light they throw on the contemporary political and social conditions. The two earliest Sharada epigraphic records discovered in Kashmir so far belong to the reign of Queen Didda. One of them is incised on the base of an image of the Bodhisattva Padmapani, preserved in the S. P. S. Museum, Srinagar and the other is engraved on a stone slab discovered from a private house in Srinagar and now lying in the Lahore Museum. The former, which is dated in the year 65 in the reign of Queen Didda, records the consecration of a religious gift consisting of the image itself by a son of *Rajanaka* Bhima and the latter, dated in the year 68, mentions a certain individual Dharnanka who gladdened his mother by charitable diggings (probably of wells, tanks etc.) and dedicated some charitable work, the nature of which is not traceable in the record, the text being lost at this place, to perpetuate her memory. The dates of the inscriptions probably refer to the Laukila era and correspond respectively to 989 and 992 A. D. Both these dates fall well within the reign of Queen Didda and thus attest to the correctness of Kalhana's chronology.

The point of some historical importance in the two records is the mention of Queen Didda with the masculine epithets of *deva* and *rajan*. These epithets for the Queen sound rather queer but they would show how she was looked upon by the people of her times more as a powerful king than as a mere queen apparently because of her energy, political acumen and essentially masculine traits of character which enabled her to rule over Kashmir with firmness for more than half a century in very troubled times.

The two inscriptions, further, present a glaring picture of the religious tolerance as practised in ancient Kashmir. While the one which contains an invocation of Lord Vishnu in the beginning attests to the flourishing state of Vaishnavism in the valley in the 10th century, the other furnishes evidence of the flourishing condition of Buddhism in the valley about the same time. The predominant Brahmanic faith, however, appears to have exercised great influence on the contemporary Buddhist religion. An evidence to this effect is furnished by the image of the Bodhisattva as wearing a sacred thread in the fashion of the Brahmanas.

THE DACCHAN STONE INSCRIPTION OF ANANTADEVA :

Our next inscription in date belongs to the reign of Nantadeva. It is incised on a big hard-grained granite boulder which was discovered by R.C. Kak at Dacchan near Kishtwar. It is dated in the year 12 in the reign of Sri Nantadeva. This king appears to be identical with the king Ananta who ruled Kashmir from 1028 to 1063 A.D. The year 12, presumably of the Laukika era, corresponds to 1036 A.D. which well falls within the reign of the king. The inscription does not provide any details about the king except the bare mention of his name. The findspot of the inscription would, however, show that Kishtwar lay within his empire. This seems all the more likely since Ananta's conquest of Chamba and Vallapura recounted by Kalhana could not have been effected without the previous possession of Kishtwar which lay on the direct route to it.

The brief record is specially important as it furnishes evidence of the common man's active participation in the works of public utility even in the remote corners of ancient Kashmir. We learn that an individual named Mahima gupta constructed a bridge for the good of people obviously at Dacchan where the inscribed stone was found. The official who designed the bridge bore the designation Karmapati and is probably the same as *Navakarmapati* commonly met with in inscriptions and signifying an officer in charge of new constructions. In our case, he was probably an over seer or mistri to whom the execution of the construction of the bridge was entrusted,

S.P.S. MUSEUM AND ARIGOM STONE INSCRIPTIONS OF JAYASIMHA

Our next inscription from Kashmir belongs to the reign of king Jayasimha. It is preserved in the S. P. S. Museum, Srinagar and is dated in the year 25 which when referred to the Laukika era corresponds to 1149 A.D. The epigraph records the re-consecration probably of some image or religious institution by the son of a certain

Bhattagovinda.

Except the bare mention of Jayasimha, the inscription does not furnish any information of historical importance about him. He, however, seems to be identical with the king Simha mentioned in our next important inscription, viz. the Arigom stone slab inscription of the (Laukika) year 73 corresponding to 1197 A.D. which contains the interesting information of the latter having burnt a wooden shrine constructed by a certain Ramadeva to house an image of the Bodhisattva Avalokitesvara near Gangeshvara temple. The identification seems all the more plausible since the burning of Arigom (ancient Hadigrama) in Jayasimha's reign is also referred to by Kalhana who attributes the burning of the town to Jayasimha's powerful minister Sujji. It would seem that the shrine was burnt down along with the village itself.

For the history of religion in Kashmir, the Arigom inscription, now lying in the S. P. S. Museum, Srinagar, is particularly important as it furnishes evidence of the continued flourishing state of Buddhism in the valley even as late as the end of the 12th century. From this inscription, as also from that of the reign of Queen Didda discussed above we learn that the Mahayana school of Buddhism, which first introduced the concept of Bodhisattva in the Buddhist faith, had a great following in the Valley in the 10th and the subsequent centuries and that the worship of Bodhisattvas was prevalent. This is particularly significant since Kashmir had remained for long a great stronghold of the Sarvastivadins and the Vaibhashikas.

Again, this well preserved epigraph from Arigom contains an interesting information about the nature of the building material used in the valley in the 12th century. We learn that both wood and burnt bricks were used for architectural purpose for it is stated in the inscription that a certain Ramadeva constructed a shrine of burnt bricks in place of the wooden one which was burnt by the king Simha, i. e. Jayasimha.

THE KOTIHER INSCRIPTION OF SHIHAB-U-DIN

Our next important but unfortunately badly damaged inscription was discovered from a well at Kotiher, ancient Kaptesvara in the Anantnag district and is now lying in the Srinagar museum. It is incised on an oblong stone slab the right hand lower corner of which is broken leading to the loss of a good portion of the inscription. The epigraph begins with an invocation of Lord Ganesa, the remover of all obstacles and records the construction of some charitable work, probably a well by certain lady named Jodha. By far the most important portion of the inscription is that which contains an eulogy of Shihab-ud-Din who was the ruling king when the inscription was put up. This eulogy,

though purely conventional, is of importance as it contains some interesting facts about Shihab-ud-Din not known from the literary sources. The eulogy may briefly be summarised as follows :

" In the sacred country of Kashmir, a land of prosperity, rules the king of kings Shahabodena, a scion of the house of Pandavas; scorched by the blazing fire of whose unrivalled prowess, the enemies repaired to the far off lands, whose fame, spotless as the lustre of the thousand moons, filled the four quarters, by hearing the deafening and high pitched twang of whose powerful bow, the enemies ran away disarranged, by whom was conquered the land of the Madras.....". The rest of the text is damaged and badly carved in incorrect Sanskrit and it is difficult to make any sense out of the preserved portion.

Leaving aside the conventional portion of the praise we notice two points which are important from historical point of view. First in the mention of Sahabodena or Shihab-ud-Din as a scion of the Pandava house. This apparently sounds queer, for a Muhammadan king could hardly claim descent from the Pandavas. Kedarnath Shastri opines that the sultan took pride in being styled as a scion of the Pandavas as he wanted to link himself with the ancient lunar race of India to justify his family's accession to the valley. However, it seems more likely that the epithet is due to the pious wish on the part of the eulogiser to connect the great contemporary ruler to an illustrious and celebrated Kshatriya family of the past simply because of his greatness and prowess and without any specific consideration of the faith to which the Sultan adhered. The second important point is Shihab-ud-Din's victory over the Madras which is of great importance as the same is not mentioned in the Kashmir chronicles which otherwise gave detailed account of the victories of the Sultan.

The Madras are an ancient Kshatriya tribe whose history dates back to the Vedic times. In the Vedic literature, they figure as a people who have been divided into two sections, viz. the Dakshina-Madrah who lived in the Panjab and the Uttara-Madrah who probably lived, as Zimmer conjectures, in the land of Kashmir not distant from the Kambojas. In the *Aitreya Brahmana*, the Madras are mentioned as living beyond the Himalayas. In the *Ashtadhyayi* Madra-desa or the land of the Madras is mentioned as a janapada or a kingdom along with Kamboja, Gandhara, etc. In the *Mahabharata* the Madras are mentioned as allies of the Kauravas and their king Salya figures as the commander-in-chief as the Kaurava army. In the Allahabad pillar inscription of Samudragupta, the Madras are mentioned in the form of Madrakas as an autonomous frontier tribe "giving all kinds of taxes and obeying (his) orders and coming to perform obeisance". From these and several other references it seems that the country of the Madras lay in

the Punjab. Its capital was Sakala or modern Sialkot which stood on the bank of the Apaga stream identified with modern Aik, a small stream which has its rise in the Jammu hills and flows to the north-east of Sialkot.

Shihab-ud-Din is credited with the conquest of a large number of countries and towns in the Kashmir chronicles as e.g., Udabhandapura, Sindhu, Gandhara, Purushavira, Hidgugosha, Susarmapura, Bhautta, etc. It would seem that Shihab-ud-Din, while annexing Gandhara, Western Panjab and some parts of eastern Panjab including Susarmapura or Kot Kangra, also traversed the central Punjab and conquered the Sialkot region or the Madra-desa as it was called then.

THE KHONAMUH INSCRIPTION OF ZAIN-UL-ABIDIN

We next pass on to an inscription which is incised on a rectangular stone slab lying at the mouth of a stream at Bhuvanesvari situated on a hill side 1 mile above the village of Khonamuh and visited on way to the pilgrimage to the famous tirtha of Harshesvara or Harisvara. The record consisting of ten lines is written in verse with the exception of the date portion in the beginning which is in prose. It records the construction of a hermitage by a merchant named Purnaka at Khonamosa in the Kali year 4530 when Satisara was ruled by Jayanolabadena, son of Sakandara, and Chindaka was the district officer at Khonamosa. It further states that at Bhuvanesa situated half a *yojana* below the shrine of god Harshesvara, where flows the celestial stream, remover of all sin, there came from the castle of king Jayapida, an ascetic named Gammatisodaka to practice penance. Having conquered Mara of powerful darkness he engaged himself in meditation, wishing to attain that state of imperishableness which knows no fall and at the proper time he found the way to Siva by means of that meditation. The last part of the inscription mentions two individuals Katha and Kanathaka who stood there as witnesses and names the writer of the inscription as Gaggaka.

It will be seen that the king Jayanolabadena, mentioned as the ruling prince when the record was set up. is undoubtedly the famous Kashmir ruler Zain-ul-abidin who ruled from 1420 to 1470 A.D., who was the son of Sikandara, Sakandara of our inscription, who was the king of Kashmir from 1389 to 1413 A.D. The Kali year 4530 corresponds to 1428 A.D. which would show that the hermitage was built in the eighth regnal year of Zain-ul-abidin. The hermitage is no longer extant. There is an old mosque at the site of the inscription but it cannot be said with certainty if this shrine represents the

ancient hermitage.

The inscription is specially important as it contains some place-names like Satisara, Khonamosa and the castle of Jayapeda. Satisara, as is well-known, is the ancient name of Kashmir which, according to a legend told at length in the *Nilamatapurana*, was originally a lake known as Satisara, Khonamosa is the Khonamusa of the *Rajatarangini* which is the ancient name of the modern village of Khonamuha situated 9 miles to the east of Srinagar. Khonamuha is the birth place of the famous poet Bilhana, author of *Vikramankadevacharita* who enthusiastically sings the charms of his home village in his celebrated work and describes it as situated in the vicinity of Jayavana, modern Zeven and as famous for its grape and saffron cultivation. The mention of the castle of king Jayapida is of interest as it is also mentioned in the *Rajatarangini* where a full legend is told in connection with its construction by the said king who was a grandson of the famous king Lalitaditya. The castle was popularly known in Kalhana's times as 'Abhyantara Kota' of the inner castle. Buhler, during the course of his tour of the valley in 1875, traced the site of the castle near the village of Andarkot situated on the Manasbal lake. It is mentioned by Shrivara at several places in his chronicle and his references together with our own would show that the place continued to be known in the 15th century as Jayapidapura or Jayapida-durga, the town or castle founded by Jayapida.

Another interesting feature of the record is the mention of district officer (*deshadhipati*) along with the ruling king. The term *deshadhipati* signifies the lord of *desha* which is a territorial unit commonly met with in the copper plate inscriptions. In the present case it denotes a district or a tahsil.

HARI PARBAT GRAVE STONE INSCRIPTION OF MOHAMMAD SHAH

Our next well-known inscription is engraved on a rock in the cemetery surrounding the Ziarat of Baha-ud-din at Hariparbat. The inscription is widely known and has been referred to by Hultzsch, Kielhorn and also described briefly by Marshall in his Tour report. The inscription, which is accompanied by the Persian inscription in Arabic characters, of the same content, commemorates the death of certain Saida Khan, son of Aibrahm who fell in the battle near Jisthaludra mentioned as Takhta-Gahi-Sulaiman in the Persian inscription. The epigraph is dated in the year 60, on the first day of the dark fortnight of the month of Shravana in the reign of Muhammad Shah. Muhammad Shah is undoubtedly the Muslim king of this name who ruled over Kashmir at chequered intervals from 1484 to 1537 A.D. The date of the inscription corresponds, according to the calculations of Kielhorn, to Friday, 9th July, 1484 A.D.

There can be no doubt that the battle referred to in the inscription is the same battle which was fought at Srinagar between the Sayyids and the Kashmiri nobles in the time of the minor king Muhammad Shah. The date of the inscription coincides with the date of the termination of the battle as given by Shrivara.

Saida Khan mentioned in the inscription seems to be identical with Saida Khan described by Shrivara as one of the great soldiers who fought on the side of the Sayyids. Unfortunately Shrivara gives no details about Saida Khan and the identification of his father Aibrahm is as such difficult. In the Persian inscription accompanying our epigraph the name given is Ibrahim Shah. Marshall suggests that he may be identified with Ibrahim Shah Sharqui, king of Jaunpur (1401-1440 A.D.) who along with his son Saida Khan seems to have fled to Kashmir on the annexation of Jaunpur by Bahlol Lodhi in 1474 A.D.

The two epigraphs furnish interesting evidence of the contemporary use of the Sharada and the Arabic scripts in the Valley during the Muhammadan period.